

White Paper Series #2

June 2010



NET SAFETY RESOURCES

BUSTED: OKAY, I MESSED UP, NOW WHAT?

DAN LOHRMANN

BUSTED: OKAY, I MESSED UP, NOW WHAT?

Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat.—F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Can you please come in here for a minute?”

Walking into the division director’s office, there were three people already sitting around the small table. Who are these guys? They look like they just had a bowlful of lemons for lunch. This can’t be good.

“Have a seat.” After gently closing the door, my boss sat down. The silence was deafening. “We have a slight problem.” You could cut the air with a knife.

I lowered my voice to just above a whisper. “I sent the report yesterday. The auditors are happy.”

“This isn’t about the auditors—yet.” My longtime friend’s uncharacteristic stare was painful. “They’ve found some things on your computer. I didn’t believe it at first, but their evidence is pretty darn convincing. I suggest you cooperate fully while they ask you a few questions.”

Shocked and confused, I tried to keep my composure. I looked around the room before I spoke in disbelief. “But...”

I was quickly interrupted. “Be careful. They’re writing down everything you say. It can and will be used against you. Remember what happened to Sam. Remember forensics. Be honest.”

Over the next few hours, time seemed to stand still. Slowly, it sunk in. I was busted.



The “I” in this story could be anyone—young or old, male or female, slacker or superstar. But could it be you? “Acceptable use investigations” are usually led by the human resource department, and our security team has sat in on many of them. Some confrontations get nasty with employees shouting obscenities and refusing to hand over CDs, DVDs, thumb drives, or other portable equipment. Others remain peaceful.

This is a growing trend. Disciplinary meetings now occur at big and small companies, government offices, and even at non-profit organizations all over the world.

What happens next? After thinking through their actions or consulting a lawyer, many staff resign before they are fired, because they don’t want their actions paraded through the courts or available for public view via government hearings or open records. We know that many people get bitter, since they blog about what happened using anonymous names and/or fake locations.¹ A few even openly write about their experiences. One UK trader wrote about spending over 500 hours on Facebook at work in six months, despite warnings by his employer to stop.

Charlie posted the warning e-mail on his Facebook account, saying “It’s a measure of how warped I’ve become that, not only am I surprisingly proud of this, but in addition, the first thing I did was to post it here, and that losing my job worries me far less than losing Facebook ever could.”²

Others are “busted” at home or school. Someone accidentally finds unexpected files on their home PC and confronts their spouse. Parents uncover the true activities of their teenage children. A teacher gets wise to student shenanigans occurring during study hall. Or, perhaps, you’re the guilty one, but you haven’t been caught – yet. If you’ve been busted, or should be, I implore you to reconsider this well known Bible story.

A Response From a Man After God’s Own Heart

“You are that man!” There was stunned silence in the majestic throne room. The weight of Nathan’s words slowly sunk in.³

Just moments before, Nathan had weaved his tale of a wicked man, and with burning anger, King David inadvertently pronounced judgment on himself. “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!”⁴ David’s sin did not bring down his kingdom during his lifetime, but he suffered dearly for his actions. Yes, he had committed adultery, but he had also lied, coveted, and even murdered Uriah.

This was the great David who killed Goliath in early life. His resume was impeccable up to that point. But now, faced with total disgrace, David did a very rare and wise thing. He openly confessed his sins and begged for God’s mercy and forgiveness.



We know the extent of David’s repentance, because he wrote Psalm 51. What a challenge the words from this Psalm are to each of us. The depth of wisdom contained in these words never cease to amaze me. I urge you—read it, meditate and follow David’s words and example! Commenting on Psalm 51, Spurgeon said, “When we deal seriously with our sin, God will deal gently with us. When we hate what the Lord hates, he will soon make an end of it, to our joy and peace.”⁵

Although the story of David and Bathsheba has been told for thousands of years, Nathan’s words have never been more relevant. Every situation is different, but David’s experience with sin is repeated millions of times each year in America. Even if you’ve never committed adultery, studying David’s story also serves as a warning for those in the 21st Century who are considering turning their backs on God in some way. In the cyber world, forensic evidence is plentiful, and people’s sins eventually find them out.

Found Out

What do people do when they are “busted?” Unfortunately, most react very differently than David. When confronted with the truth, most go to extreme measures to hide or cover up their actions. Frequently heard: “Get me a lawyer.”

While you may need legal counsel, ponder this thought. As Dr. James Grier, distinguished Professor of Philosophical Theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, preached, ever since Adam and Eve first ate the fruit, mankind has always had the same reactions toward sin. What did our great, great..., grandparents do when they were deceived? Hide, cover-up, and blame others.

We still try to hide the truth, take (foolish) steps to cover up our actions, and finally, when plainly confronted with the facts, blame others or come up with excuses for our actions. These same principles also apply in cyberspace. Table 1 identifies some typical 21st Century behaviors following a cyber bust. As you look at this chart and think about your own situation, consider your motive along with the activity.

Table 1: Responses to Cyber Trespasses

Biblical Action (Reference)	Sample 21 st Century Cyber Equivalent Actions
Hide Genesis 3:8	Guard monitor; use personal devices and accounts (i.e. phones, USB drives, home e-mail); iconize windows; call in (or act) sick
Cover up Genesis 3:10	“Accidentally” delete files; physically destroy or throw away evidence; lie; deny wrongdoing or knowledge
Blame others Genesis 3:12-13	Overheard: “Policy is too strict, everyone’s doing it, Networks Nazis out to get me, boss doesn’t like me, my brother did it, too much work, not enough work, not my PC, accident”



Are you hiding something? Did you really rearrange your office and move your monitor for legitimate privacy reasons or so that you can engage in inappropriate acts? Are there files that no one else can see? While it is difficult to judge the true motives of others, defensive behaviors like those listed in Table 1 should raise a red flag for men and women of integrity.

We often forget that sin is, first and foremost, a breach of the moral law and an offense against God. We can run, but we can't hide, anymore than Adam and Eve could hide in the Garden. But rather than admitting mistakes or facing up to responsibility, we run from accountability or defend the indefensible.

We often forget that sin is, first and foremost, a breach of the moral law and an offense against God.

“Catch Me If You Can”

Some readers will undoubtedly be in a very different place than King David. You've never been busted, and you doubt that you'll ever get caught. You enjoy living by your own agenda. Even though you call yourself a Christian, you're not living with integrity. You basically have the same outlook on life as Frank Abagnale when he was sixteen.

He started his “adventures” as a teenage high school dropout.

In the space of five years, Frank Abagnale passed \$2.5 million in fraudulent checks in every state and 26 foreign countries. He did it by pioneering implausible and brazen scams, such as impersonating a Pan Am pilot (puddle jumping around the world in the cockpit, even taking over the controls). He also played the role of a pediatrician and faked his way into the position of temporary resident supervisor at a hospital in Georgia. Posing as a lawyer, he conned his way into a position in a state attorney general's office, and he taught a semester of college-level sociology with a purloined degree from Columbia University.⁶

Abagnale, who still travels the country giving speeches and advice to companies about identity theft, frequently states that living as a fraud is even easier today than it was in the 1960s—because of the Internet.⁷ His fascinating stories show that, despite advances in technology, there will always be ways to “beat the system” for those who have that motive. Solutions must address matters of the heart with individuals.

Which Group Are You In?

Everyone is different, but I want to address three different groups of people that are engaged in various types of sinful behavior online. The first group knows what



they're doing is wrong, but they have no intention of stopping. They enjoy it too much. Like the young Frank Abagnale, their attitude is basically "Catch me if you can." Some are very careful to conceal their web habits while others are more open. Many have convinced themselves that they can manage their sinful activities—especially online ones—privately.

Stories of teenagers and even adults at work behaving badly show up almost daily in the paper. For example, the Associated Press reported: "A Kalamazoo County (MI) sheriff's deputy has been suspended with pay for photos on MySpace.com that show people posing suggestively in and around his patrol vehicle."⁸

Group 1—The Searchers: What Drives You?

Members of this group can even defend their actions by pronouncing that the Bible says, "Judge not lest you be judged." They emphasize freedom, grace, privacy and personalized definitions of virtue. In his book *Losing Our Virtue*, David F. Wells says it this way:

The world in which the cultural demand of tolerance is heard is one in which all values are privatized. People can believe what they want, and within the law, do want they want, but it becomes intolerable if they imagine that what they believe includes standards of belief and morality that are applicable to others. Today, that is the unforgivable sin.⁹

If you are a "searcher" trying to find happiness and fulfillment, you may be looking for love in all the wrong places. David Wells goes on to describe how many people try to transform and save themselves through fun experiences and accumulating earthly possessions. They try to ease their pain through consumer indulgence, they think they'll be happy or popular—if I only buy a certain product or develop a new look.¹⁰

We forget that most movie stars who seem rich and popular are often divorced and unhappy. Outward appearances deceive and do not bring the inward fulfillment that the media portrays.

The reality is that none of us can get rid of the sense of right and wrong that God created inside us. We know certain behaviors are wrong, but we can't understand our thoughts or control our actions. We continue doing the things that we know to be hurtful. These contradictions are the direct result of our battle with sin. We need to recognize this battle as a first step.

I remember when I took drivers' education. I was sitting in a room full of overconfident teenagers who whispered jokes after 80% of the instructor's comments. Our teacher tried so hard, but to little avail. For example, she asked, "Why do you think accidents occur?"



One troublemaker from the back of the room blurted out his answer in an arrogant tone. “Because people like to drive fast!” The class burst out in laughter. The teacher looked down in disgust. Although I wasn’t the most respectful student, I felt sorry for her. And yet, that ring leader inadvertently gave the correct answer. Yes, there are many causes of road accidents, but the desire to drive fast does cause a large percentage of fatal accidents.

On the last day of class, that same teacher showed us a short movie, based on a true story, about a group of teenagers that drove too fast and out of control. As you might expect, several people died, but the driver lived. The drama ends with an interview of that driver, which had a big impact on the class.

You could have heard a pin drop after the movie.

Cyberspace is another highway with great risk because it impacts moral as well as physical lives. “Girls (and boys) just want to have fun” without thinking through the consequences of their actions. If this characterization describes where you’re at right now, I want to encourage, warn, and challenge you.

Cyberspace is another highway with great risk because it impacts moral as well as physical lives.

The encouragement: reading about virtual integrity takes courage and implies that something inside of you is crying for a change. You are searching for a way to get back onto the straight and narrow. I don’t believe you are reading this by accident.

My warning: you had better act while you have the opportunity. Avoiding or ignoring cyber trespasses will only make matters worse. If you continue down this road, your sins will surely find you out. “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”¹¹

My challenge for you is to stop and repent. Consider these words from Spurgeon:

There is nothing more certain than this—that you cannot be saved and keep your sins—they must be parted with.

No man can carry fire in his bosom and yet be safe from burning. While you drink the poison, it must and will work death in you. The thief cannot expect mercy while he keeps the goods he has stolen.

[...] Give up all that opposes Christ! For if you do not give it up, your soul will be lost!¹²

Despite clear evidence and even conviction of wrongdoing, many never let go of the “fires in their bosoms.” They continue to “drink the poison,” not realizing that their career, family, and their relationship with God is in serious jeopardy.

How was Spurgeon so certain of this? The Bible is clear: “For the wages of sin is death.”¹³ In addition to the Bible, evidence from life is overwhelming regarding this truth. Go to a trusted pastor, priest or Christian friend and get it off your chest.



Perhaps you need professional help, but no one can help you if don't take the first step. This isn't just about fooling the security department at work or your family members. Your soul is at stake.

Group 2—Been Busted: Where Will you Turn?

There's a second group of people. You've been caught - busted. You're dealing with the consequences of your actions in cyberspace. You can tell your own version of the story at the beginning of this chapter. Perhaps your family has been torn apart by your online addictions. Or maybe you've only been "partially busted." Others don't (yet) know the full extent of your online conduct.

My question to you is not just what will you learn from your mistakes, but where will you turn? From my perspective, it was the grace of God that you were caught before things got worse. Have you admitted your mistakes? Have you repented to God and those wronged?

If yes, you'll need continued motivation to walk the talk. If not, a first step is to stop blaming others and take responsibility for your actions. If you're stuck somewhere on Table 1, you must recognize that you are heading down the wrong path. Don't buy the lies that it's too late to go back. It is never too late with God. As F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat."¹⁴

Pastor John Kilpatrick says that the final phase in the progressive nature of sin is the "great transgression."

The great transgression is not so much a sin as it is an attitude [...] Pride is a sin; it is an action. Embezzling money is a sin; it is an action [...] In Psalm 19, David pleaded with God to be kept from the great transgression. The great transgression happens when someone arrives at the point where they don't repent of their sin any longer because they feel that they've reached a deal with God [...] They justify their sins by saying, "God understands, He knows how I am."¹⁵

Digging a little deeper. After being busted for wrongdoing, which disciple will you emulate—Peter or Judas? Both Peter and Judas repented for their actions, but in very different ways.¹⁶ They both had spent significant time with Jesus and heard his words of life. Why did one become a great leader while the other committed suicide? Consider the words of former Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen:

Because Peter repented unto the Lord, but Judas unto himself [...] Judas was the type who said, "What a fool I am." Peter, "Oh what a sinner." It is a paradox that we begin to be good only when we know we are evil. Judas had self disgust, which is a form of pride. Peter had, not a regrettable experience, but a change of heart. Judas went to the confessional of his own paymaster, Peter unto the Lord.



Judas grieved for the consequences of his sin, as a single girl might sorrow over her pregnancy. Peter was sorry for the sin itself, because he wounded Love. Guilt without hope in Christ is despair and suicide. Guilt with hope in Christ is mercy and joy.¹⁷

Many sermons have been written about how we can learn from Peter's miraculous turn from his failures into a life of victory. What was his "defining moment?" I believe it was this: "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken."¹⁸

Why was that moment so important? Rev. Ronald Rolheiser, who believes we all face the same tests as Peter, said this:

What Peter saw on Jesus' face was not, as we would expect, a look of disappointment and reproach but something Peter had likely never seen or experienced before in his whole life, namely, a look that holds you in warmth and understanding even when you sin and betray.¹⁹

Just a few hours earlier, Peter had proudly proclaimed that he would follow Jesus to his death, but he failed miserably and broke his word when faced with temptation. What brought him back to genuine humility after he sinned? Jesus' loving intervention.

Just as parents love their children despite their wrongdoings, our God intervenes and not only reminds us of our sincere pledge to be loyal, but through His penetrating, loving look actually enables us to live rightly. Just as Peter wept and was changed and restored in his relationships with both God and man, so we too can be transformed by looking to Christ. A changed heart will bring a changed life.

Group 3—Can You Recognize "Respectable" Cyber Sin?

Perhaps you neither emulate Frank Abagnale (pre-jail) nor have you been busted. The rest of us end up here by default. We face daily online temptations and struggle in an ongoing battle to maintain our virtue. Our Internet culture pressures us to water down the Ten Commandments, justify questionable actions, and live in shades of gray. I have a challenge and a question for this group as well. First, the question: can you identify the "respectable sins" in your online life?

Notice the last two columns in Table 2, which provide a different perspective on Table 1 using Christian values as the standard, and not just your company policy nor the fact that a web filter still lets you visit certain websites. These are just a few examples of how sinful online activities are usually renamed into acceptable common practices at home and work. I reiterate that not all of these tempting activities lead to sin—but many do.



Table 2 – Employee Stereotypes, Moral Risks, and Solutions

Employee Name/Description	Workplace Temptations	Potential Sin and Risk to Authentic Faith	Possible Biblical Answers and References
Adventurous Alex Desperately seeking new buzz, experience	Playing games, Second Life, other virtual worlds; gambling	Idolatry (excitement, money); stealing (time)	Ambassadors for Christ 2 Cor. 5:20 Faith Rom. 8
Bored Blake Doesn't like his job; not enough to do	Looking for jobs, real estate, cars, auctions, news, etc.	Selfish ambition; laziness; stealing (time)	Responsibility, training Prov. 18:9; Matt. 25:26
Curious Kate Loves new stuff; surfs for romance, gossip	Updating personal webpages, e-mail, MySpace, Facebook	Impurity; lust; stealing (time)	Contentment Phil. 4:11-12
Fanatic Fred Loves sports; reads analyses of games; betting	Checking scores, fantasy sports leagues; chatting, etc.	Worldliness; stealing (time)	Balance, focus on things of God 1 John 2:15-17
Homebound Holly Works from home; watches kids	Using home PC for work; mixing home/work, personal business	Lack of discipline; stealing (time)	Gain discipline Prov. 1:2; 23:23
Traveling Tom Executive; takes chances; "owed" fun	Viewing porn; playing games; using portable devices to go around controls	Lust; cheating; lying; adultery	Faithfulness, wisdom Matt. 5:27-28, Prov. 5, 6:20-35
Deserving Debbie High-producer; earns right to surf	Watching YouTube videos; visiting news sites, how-to portals	Pride; arrogance; bitterness	Humility Prov. 11:2, 18:12, 22:4; James 4:5-6
Naïve Nina Student; doesn't realize the rules or the risks	Illegal downloading; using personal devices; treating Net as a "right"	Lack of maturity; lying; stealing (software and copyright)	Wisdom, fear of God Prov. 1:7, Phil. 2:12
Savvy Sam Techie, cyber guru; bypasses controls; secret life online; well regarded	Downloading music, movies, porn; treating deception as a challenge; doing personal work on company time	Stealing (software and copyright); lying; anger; cheating; pride; false sense of self worth	Transforming grace Rom. 6, 1 John 1:7-8, 3:6, 5:17-18
Lonely Linda Looks for deeper relationships online	Visiting dating sites; connecting with distant friends, family	Loneliness leading to envy; stealing (time); idolatry (relationships)	True understanding of God's love 1 John 3:16-21
Greedy Greg Focuses on money-making schemes	Actively following stock quotes, Wall Street, eBay, hot tips, deals	Greed; idolatry (money, things); stealing (resources, time)	Lover of God, faith 1 Tim. 6:10, Heb. 13:5
All of the above	Going places online that they shouldn't go during work	Poor witness; loss of virtue, family, and faith in God	Live by Spirit, accountability Gal. 5:22-26



This analysis is not politically correct, especially in the business world, but also in many churches that now avoid the word “sin” altogether. People would rather hear only positive messages, but I’m convinced that other more simplistic approaches will ultimately fall short. Serious problems require real solutions. John F. MacArthur, Jr. addressed this trend.

I recently listened to a radio program interview with a preacher who assiduously avoids any mention of sin in his preaching because he feels people are burdened with too much guilt anyway [...] But people’s deepest need is to confess and overcome their sin. So preaching that fails to confront and correct sin through the Word of God does not meet people’s need.²⁰

The well-known Christian author Jerry Bridges writes about how we have created “respectable sins.” While Christians condemn the big sins such as adultery, we often create a kind of sliding scale where gossip, lust, selfishness, and other evil acts become acceptable.

Here is the unvarnished truth that we need to lay to heart. Even though our hearts have been renewed [...] this principle of sin still lurks within us and wages war against our souls. It is the failure to recognize the awful reality that provides the fertile soil in which our “respectable” or “acceptable” sins grow and flourish [...] We who are believers tend to evaluate our character and conduct relative to the moral culture in which we live. Since we usually live at a higher moral standard than society at large, it is easy for us to feel good about ourselves and to assume that God feels that way also. We fail to reckon with the reality of sin still dwelling within us.²¹

Bridges goes on to compare these sins to cancer in our body, which grows unseen and is often not detected until it has become a major problem. While Bridge’s principle certainly applies to all areas of life, this battle to identify sinful patterns is certainly red hot in cyberspace.

Our Challenge: Stop Renaming Cyber Thoughts and Behaviors.

Was that really sin? Eve fell for the snake’s line, “Did God really say...?” We succumb to society’s crafty new definition of morality and define right and wrong on our own new terms. We are blinded, not terrified by the law as Martin Luther was. If we really understood the horrible darkness in us as a result of our sin, we would rush to get help immediately, but we don’t. We think things aren’t that bad. We apply “spin” to our online activities.



Not surprisingly, many in society now question company policies in the same way. Even when the expected conduct is very clear, employees think they know better and apply a different standard “to get my work done.” I’m not suggesting company rules are the same as the Ten Commandments, but pondering the similar reactions is interesting. Bottom line: despite the fact that we are really weak and prone to fall, we act proud and tend to rebel against the rules.

There are an infinite number of examples of how these truths impact cyber life at work. Take, for example, laziness, which we’d all like to forget is actually a sin. An article entitled “The Real Barrier to Security: We’re All Too Lazy” was written to describe how our slothful habits hurt everything from cybersecurity (not doing the simple technical things we need to do to protect information) to our health (taking the elevator and not the stairs). Scott Berinato, a writer for *Chief Security Officer (CSO) Magazine*, wrote, “We resist anything that puts off instant gratification, that keeps us from being lazy as possible.”²²

Berinato’s analysis is right on, but he doesn’t go far enough. He could write a similar article on greed, pride, anger, lust, lying, cheating, stealing, or a long list of other cyber sins. But we don’t call conduct by these names. We justify and rename our thoughts and behaviors with vocabulary like relaxation, ease of use, or entertainment. Even after deliberately violating policy, bypassing security, or even breaking the law, staff innocently call the help desk and expect “better customer service.”

At home, the same questions and challenges apply. Most families say that life is just too busy, and yet a worldwide addiction to sports has become a very respectable hobby. I struggle in this area. Idolizing sports teams and heroes to the point of absurdity, I’m prone to read about them, surf the Internet for more stories, and even enter chat rooms and listen to ESPN radio discussions that seem to never end. Others join fantasy sports leagues and spend endless hours engaged in analyzing players and statistics.

Often times, these temptations can be very subtle. On a typical fall afternoon, I plan to watch the big game, but after the game is over, another interesting game comes on with “some significance.” Rather than cutting the lawn, I decide to watch that game as I’m half asleep. Later that week, I can’t help a neighbor or attend a church event because I need to cut the lawn. The same types of experiences can happen at websites with their never-ending stories or pre- and post-game analysis. After baseball comes football, and after college football on Saturdays comes pro football on Sundays. When one sports season ends, we move to the next.

Some will say I’ve gone too far. There is nothing sinful about watching sports or even about fantasy games. This is wholesome entertainment that can be enjoyed by the entire family. Okay, but when do these habits go over the line and become laziness? The Internet and modern media offer hundreds of cable channels offering

Bottom line: despite the fact that we are really weak and prone to fall, we act proud and tend to rebel against the rules.



choices. There always seems to be some game on TV. Too much of a good thing can become problematic.

Not to let women or men who don't like sports off so easily, the same statements could be made about fashion, soap operas, movies, movie star lifestyles, the latest gossip, news-talk shows, financial websites, or chat rooms on just about any hobby on earth. Cyberspace adds a powerful exclamation point to whatever you are "idolize." More than ever before, like-minded people can find each other across continents and time zones.

My natural inclination is to watch sports events whenever downtime permits, and my wife still says "Too much—the TV is going off" on occasion. Like millions of men around the world, I'm just wired that way. One way that I determine if an activity is serving me or if I am serving the activity is by asking: What thoughts are dominating my life? Where do I want to go online when I have a few spare minutes? What brings me joy? Ask a trusted friend or spouse whether your use of time is balanced, because it is so easy to be deceived.

Powerful Impact of Sin in Cyberspace

No matter which person(s) you identify with in Table 2, each of us suffers to some extent with online sins. We are also impacted by the cyber sins of others. Sin's impact is immense and represents the root problem to fixing all aspects of cyberspace—whether external hackers trying to break into systems or the "insider threats" in our offices and home. I'm not just referring to individual acts, but the overall effect of sin. Once we realize the extent of the problem, Christians can work to restore and revitalize and redeem our corner of the Internet with God's help.

In C.S. Lewis' well-known story *The Magician's Nephew*, Polly and Digory visit an enchanted world that is frozen in stone. While wandering through the halls, they confront a little golden bell with a golden hammer to hit the bell with. Here are the words that were written on the pillar next to the bell:

Make your choice, adventurous Stranger;
Strike the bell and bide the danger,
Or wonder, till it drives you mad,
What would have followed if you had.²³

After reading this poem, the children's debate for quite a while before deciding to strike the bell. As a result, a beautiful but evil queen awakens and eventually enters Narnia. Tragically for Narnia, this momentarily perfect world with so many possibilities instantly becomes paradise lost. You need to read the *Chronicles of Narnia* to understand all the other horrible things that result from this evil queen's entrance.



Although C.S. Lewis wrote the stories of Narnia decades before cyberspace was born, his illustrations are analogous to how sin entered cyberspace. Just as Narnia changed forever when the queen entered, so cyberspace is infected with the same sickness.

The Biblical Response to Sin

Christians today see the beauty and importance of “giving all” and even “crucifying the sinful nature with its passions and desires”²⁴ to serve God. Many raise their hands and unashamedly shout out their praise. On July 21, 2007, I enjoyed a Jeremy Camp conference in Ionia, Michigan. Jeremy lost his first wife to cancer and he tells several genuine, heart-felt stories of “being on his face before God in prayer.” Thousands joined in worship and sang these words from one of his hit songs, “Show me what it means to live my life—a sacrifice,” which is based on well-known verses in Romans.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached that there are five steps in the process of biblically dealing with sin.²⁵ I briefly summarize some of his principles below, but I urge you to read this entire sermon.

1. **Realize the nature of sin and its consequences.** Many Christians have an inadequate view of sin, which is distinct from the individual “sins” we commit. Our natures are sinful. Sin caused Christ to die for us.
2. **Recognize the importance of the soul and its destiny.** Our eternal destiny is paramount. Everything else in our lives needs to be secondary. Jesus said, “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”²⁶
3. **We must hate sin, and do all we can to destroy it at all costs within ourselves.** Loving the Lord means training ourselves to hate evil. We need a heart free from lusts. The Puritans used to analyze and expose sin.
4. **Realize the ideal is to have a clean and pure heart—a heart free from lusts.** We are not just free from certain behaviors. On the contrary, we seek a pure and clean heart. Christ said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”²⁷ Our ambition should be a life demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit.²⁸
5. **Understand the importance of the mortification of sin.** Jesus said, “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”²⁹

Should we literally cut off our hand or gouge out our eyes? There are stories of people in history who actually cut off limbs after reading this verse and being so convicted



of their sins that they took Jesus' words literally. Lloyd-Jones said no, this is a negative view of mortification. Jesus was emphasizing the eternal impact of sin. Rather, as Paul says, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."³⁰

Should we literally cut off our hand or gouge out our eyes?

Cyber Confessions: Be Careful

In a society where many avoid commitment and new relationships, many look to the Internet to resolve the same problems that got them in trouble in the first place. While this occasionally works, be careful.

An article entitled "Confession is Just a Keypad Away" appeared in *USA Today*.³¹ The article did a good job of describing both the good and bad associated with this new trend. Here's how it started:

Confession used to be good for the soul. On the Internet, it may be good for business, as well, judging from the proliferation of websites where reading about the errant ways of others provides both online therapy and a bit of voyeuristic entertainment.³²

From stealing money from the cash register at work to immoral fantasies to the daily struggles of a deployed military spouse, these websites provide a forum to vent. Even though confession to priests and pastors is on the decline, the popularity of these sites is skyrocketing. While the benefits sometimes include links to Christian messages and opportunities to connect with pastors and other professionals who most would not visit in person, these sites can also provide a huge temptation to go back into sin, justify actions (by reading about others who are worse), or not moving away from habitual patterns in life.

On the other hand, some websites can provide a good opportunity to discuss life's challenges with others in a similar situation, such as truemilitarywivesconfessions.com. My wife and I regularly visited online adoption forums prior to two international adoptions. We learned from the experiences of others and had many questions answered.

But a word of warning. Christians may justify going to sites where sexually graphic statements or foul language is removed, but these sites can also become a bridge to visiting other sites that post explicit details. Just the discussion topics can become a temptation to some. My recommendation is to assess whether a site is good or bad influence, discuss your decisions with trusted friends and family, and stay away from the other sites. Block them if they are a temptation. Accountability is essential, but it needs to be with someone you know and trust, not anonymous strangers.



You're Not Alone in This Battle

Sometimes the cyber battle can seem impossible and you may feel isolated and alone in this struggle. The Bible is full of defeated men and women who were forgiven after they cried out to God for mercy. The truth is that Jesus was a friend of sinners.

Jon Bloom, the Executive Director of Desiring God Ministries, put it this way as he closes a newsletter entitled “Jesus Chooses and Uses Failures—‘Forgiven,’ not ‘Failure’ Defines Christian”:

The church of Jesus Christ is a fellowship of forgiven failures. In (the apostle) Peter, Jesus shows us how he can transform a failure into rock of strength for his church. Empowered by the Spirit of his beloved Lord. Peter became a humble, encouraging, suffering, and persevering disciple of Jesus. And he became a bold ambassador of the gospel of forgiveness to the most miserable failures.³³

I was especially impressed with the way that Jon ends his letter, calling himself “Your friend and fellow redeemed failure.” Christians can be free from condemnation, and truly rejoice in our weaknesses. This is possible because it results in us running to Christ and relying on the gospel.

Psalm 103 says:

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits –
Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and
compassion,
Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is
renewed like the eagle's.

What a rich set of promises! Our joy comes from a gracious God who forgives us after we mess up. The heart of God is revealed in these glorious verses, and I certainly long for this forgiveness, redemption from the pit, fatherly compassion, satisfied desires, renewed youth, and eternal love.

This psalm was written by King David. Despite his well-known act of adultery, David was “a man after God’s own heart.” There is a condition that is listed twice in these verses. These promises are for those who “fear him.” David clearly knew what meant to fear God. What does it mean to truly fear him today?



(ENDNOTES)

1. Note: If you search "busted at work for web surfing" you'll see over 60,000 page views filled with stories, but if you Google "how to get around filters at work," you'll get more than 2 million results with better stories.
2. Michael Arrington, "Career Advice: Don't Spend Half Your Work Day On Facebook And Then Brag About It," *TechCrunch*, March 9, 2007. <http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/03/09/career-advice-dont-choose-facebook-over-your-job/> (Accessed May 28, 2010).
3. 2 Samuel 12:7-9
4. 2 Samuel 12:5
5. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms*, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993), 211.
6. Amazon.com, Review of Stan Redding and Frank W. Abignale, *Catch Me if You Can* (Broadway: Later Printing Edition, 2000). <http://www.amazon.com/Catch-Me-If-You-Can/dp/0767905385> (Accessed May 28, 2010).
7. Norman Swan. "Interview with Frank Abignale." *Life Matters with Norman Swan*, March 17, 2000. <http://anlimara.tripod.com/abagnaleintervw.html> (Accessed May 28, 2010).
8. Associated Press, "Michigan deputy suspended for photos on MySpace," September 9, 2007. http://www.wzzm13.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=80617 (Accessed May 28, 2010).
9. David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 51.
10. *Ibid.*, 81-116. See also 162-163 on contradictions.
11. 2 Corinthians 6:2
12. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "North and South," *Sermon #1007*. http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=10&contentID=3660&commInfo=16&topic=Sermons (Accessed May 28, 2010).
13. Romans 6:23
14. F. Scott Fitzgerald. <http://quotes.wordpress.com/2007/09/15/defeat/> (Accessed May 28, 2010).
15. John Kilpatrick, "The Progressive Nature of Sin." <http://www.befreeinchrist.com/Miscellaneous/ProgressiveNature.htm> (Accessed May 28, 2010).
16. See Luke 22:62 for Peter and Matthew 27:3-4 for Judas.
17. Fulton J. Sheen, *The Priest is Not His Own* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 172-173.
18. Luke 22:61



19. Ronald Rolheiser, "Betraying Jesus as Peter Did," March 17, 2006. http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/ron/ron_282.html (Accessed May 28, 2010).
20. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 34.
21. Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: 2007), 24.
22. Scott Berinato, "The Real Barrier to Security: We're All Too Lazy," *CSO Magazine Online*, December 17, 2007. http://www.csoonline.com/article/221312/The_Real_Barrier_to_Security_We_re_All_Too_Lazy (Accessed May 28, 2010).
23. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: HarperTrophy, 1994), 56.
24. Galatians 5:24
25. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 215-221.
26. Matthew 16:26
27. Matthew 5:8
28. See Galatians 5:16-26
29. Matthew 5:30
30. Romans 8:13
31. Sharon Jayson, "Confession is Just a Keypad Away," *USA Today*, November 28, 2007. http://www.usatoday.com/tech/webguide/internetlife/2007-11-28-online-confessions_N.htm (Accessed May 28, 2010).
32. Ibid.
33. Jon Bloom, "Jesus Chooses and Uses Failures," *Desiring God Newsletter*, September 2007. http://www.desiringgod.org/AboutUs/MonthlyNewsletter/2007_09/ (Accessed May 28, 2010).



Dan Lohrmann is the Chief Technology Officer for the state of Michigan. For seven years he was the Chief Information Security Office for the Michigan government. After getting a degree in computer science from Johns Hopkins University, he started his career in the National Security Agency, and later worked for Lockheed Martin in England. He is an internationally recognized Internet and computer security expert. He is also a committed Christian husband and father.

Dan is the author of *Virtual Integrity: Faithfully Navigating the Brave New Web*. Find out more about him at <http://www.virtualintegritybook.com>.



Net Safety Resources provides practical advice for Christians seeking to use the Internet with integrity. It was established in 2010 by Covenant Eyes and Dan Lohrmann.

White papers are available online at: <http://netsafetyresources.com/articles/>

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica. Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica.